

Executive Summary

Main Findings

This Impact-se report revisits the Palestinian Authority school curriculum, which is perhaps the chief expression of Palestinian cultural independence. The report covers the main findings of our 2011 report as well as some current observations up to and including, the 2015–16 terror wave.

Major findings include some positives: civil and gender issues, care for the environment, respect for the internal Other (disabled, authority figures, elderly) and the Muslim/Arab Other (collaboration with Arab countries). Vilification of the West is widespread but not to the point of violence.

More troubling from the perspective of Israeli Palestinian peace is: (1) deligitimization of Israel and the Jewish national movement; (2) the paradoxical presentation of Israel as an evil entity to be eradicated (while it does not actually exist on maps); (3) the concept of Return, manifested as the requirement to settle millions of Palestinians within Israel; (4) continuous war drawing on a culture of martyrdom (5) rejection of negotiations (6) commitment to a strategy combining violence with international pressure until Israel ceases to exist.

While the curriculum does not directly call for students to take up arms and attack Israelis, it instills an atmosphere of endless war and dedication to violence. Thus, it does not meet UNESCO Standards for peace and tolerance. The curriculum espouses a strategy of ejecting Middle Eastern Jews from their lives in an independent nation-state—presumably to a helpless persecuted minority status, if not worse. Yet, the report allows for some guarded optimism: **transformation is possible**. And the crucial lever of that change for its youth must be in the Palestinian curriculum, itself.

Fostering Hate

In its current form, the PA curriculum fosters violence in the short run and is committed to continuous violent struggle over time, thus promoting a strategy which rejects negotiations, encourages violence and relies on international pressure.

Long Term Strategy

In the Palestinian curriculum, the State of Israel, with one exception, never actually appears on maps. Palestine, as an Arab country, occupies the entire geographical space, from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean Sea. Within this context, Israel has never existed.

According to the curriculum, “Israeli occupation” refers to Israel proper, meaning that Israel is a territory for Palestinian settlement defined as the Return, and not expected to occur peacefully. Religious hatred supports violence and remains in the curriculum, mainly in sharia studies, now controlled by the “State of Palestine Ministry of Education.” The following Hadith (Islamic tradition), features as well, in Article 7 of the 1988 Hamas Charter and openly speaks about genocide awaiting the Jews:

Fighting the Jews and the victory over them: The Messenger [Muhammad] already announced [the good news of] the end of the Jews' oppression upon this Holy Land and the removal of their corruption and of their occupation thereof. [It is told] by Abu Hurayrah [one of Muhammad's Companions] that the Prophet said: 'The End of Days will not take place until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims will kill them to a point that a Jew will hide behind a rock or a tree, and then the rock or the tree will say: 'O Muslim, O God's servant, there is a Jew behind me, so come and kill him, except the salt bush (Gharqad), for it is one of the Jews' trees.'

Faith, Grade 11, [Sharia Studies] (2013), p. 94.

The PA textbooks encourage students to engage in an open *jihad* war or an endless religious frontier war of attrition (*ribat*). The right of *jihad* is widespread: "O brother, the oppressors have exceeded all bounds and *Jihad* and sacrifices are necessary."¹

The Levant is seen as an arena of endless war until the Day of Resurrection. There is no peace process, just war. The examples provided for a *ribat* war are the great battles of the past—Yarmuk, Hittin and Ain Jalut against the Romans, Crusaders and Mongols.

The people of the Levant in general and Palestine in particular, are at a state of Ribat until the Day of Resurrection . . . If you examine the history of Palestine, you shall find that momentous battles took place on Palestine's soil. Its inhabitants are in constant struggle against their enemies . . . The Battle of Yarmouk was the decisive blow to the Romans, and the Battle of Hittin was a decisive victory against the Crusaders, and the Battle of Ain Jalut decided the fight against the Mongols.

Islamic Education, Grade 12 (2014), pp. 86–87.

Once it has been established that the entire Holy Land is Palestine and that a *ribat* war should be launched until the Day of Resurrection, it follows that this curriculum advocates martyrdom.

The Palestinian strategy therefore rejects negotiations as it does the existence of the Other. The Palestinian cause is "one of the most pressing issues on the international agenda"² and is not seen as a bilateral issue. Indeed, in explaining the benefits of the failed PA attempt to attain member state status at the UN in 2011, the Palestinian schoolbook points to the "transfer of the Palestinian question from the question of bilateral negotiations, controlled by Israel, into an international question."³ Moving unilaterally, Palestinians throughout the world will be granted citizenship, allowing them automatically the right of Return to their homeland, while providing the means to pressure Israel internationally.⁴

1 *Reading and Texts*, Grade 8, Part 1 (2015), p. 66.

2 *Contemporary Issues*, Humanities, Grade 12 (2014), p. 25.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 28

4 *Ibid.*

The peaceful nature of the peace process and the commitment not to resort to violence are not presented as an inherent part of the Oslo Accords. In fact, the word “peace” hardly appears at all. Therefore, a Palestinian student barely learns at school that in the *Letters of Mutual Recognition*, “The PLO recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security” and that “The PLO commits itself to the Middle East peace process and to a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two sides and declares that all outstanding issues relating to permanent status will be resolved through negotiations.”⁵

Tactical Use of the Curriculum: Children as Ammunition

This is clearly not a curriculum of peace, but a *curriculum of war and struggle* aimed at preparing young Palestinians to fight continuously for the elimination of Israel. Because Israel cannot be wiped out in one single action, students must be educated for a long struggle.

The 1974 Phased Plan of the PLO, which allowed for lulls in the “armed struggle” in order to acquire a territorial foothold in Palestine, still seems to be the paradigm.⁶ The strategy requires the Palestinian population be loyal and obedient, allowing for diplomatic advancement in the battle against Israel while fanning the flames of violence when necessary. The PA educational system, which is also used in Israeli east Jerusalem, teaches students that the *status quo* is bad. It maintains a level of frustration and a readiness to commit acts of violence.

Strategically, the Palestinian curriculum reflects a world-view that strives to accomplish the long term goal to eliminate Israel, even in the event that a peace agreement is reached. Tactically speaking, students could best be described as coal embers ready to be ignited into flames at any moment. Under this circumstance, the curriculum provides the ideological cover for the PA to utilize Palestinian children in waves of violence, as it deems appropriate.

The curriculum is part of a sophisticated strategy that works in tandem with other tools—social media, including school magazines and Facebook pages and inflammatory public speeches that ensure Palestinian youth are ready to jump into action and to kill or be martyred.

It is important to note that it is not curricula-based incitement alone that kills Palestinian and Israeli youth. Everyone is touched by the violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including young Arab Palestinians and Jews living in Israel. Radical politicians and activists spread hate. Violence on the ground breeds anger. Local and regional media outlets fan the flames.

But children who received methodical peace education are more prepared to resist the temptation to act out violently. They are more likely to see others as human beings, like themselves.

5 *Letters of Mutual Recognition* (September 9, 1993) (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/recogn.html>). Mentioned briefly in the curriculum in *Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine*, Grade 11, Part 2 (2014), p. 83.

6 Also known as the PLO’s Ten Point Program; adopted by the Palestinian National Council (PNC), Cairo 8 June 1974. Arabic: *khuttat al marahel*, or *barnamadj al-niqat al-’ashr*.

This, however, is not the case for those children exposed to a curriculum devised to turn them into tools for violence.

From Conflict to Peace: Education as a Lever of Change

The once-entertained hope that independent Palestinian curricula would become a peace-oriented enterprise, seems to have been dashed. Evaluating the curriculum from the point of view of UNESCO's standards for peace and tolerance in school education, it is clear that the curriculum does not meet these standards. Yet, if any hope for peace is to be found, it must start with curricula that have peace at their core. It is late but hopefully not too late.

Our attention should therefore be focused on this education system. A change in Palestinian education to conform to international standards—from a guerrilla mentality to peace and mutual recognition—could serve as a leverage point in helping to solve the conflict. Palestinian education—the curriculum, school activities and social media—should therefore abide by UNESCO standards

while:

- ▶ (1) Committing to the spirit and language of the peace process
- ▶ (2) Advocating mutual understanding and peace, rather than martyrdom and *eternal* violent struggle
- ▶ (3) Treating Israel as a legitimate nation and the Jews as fellow Middle Easterners, largely sharing the same religious and cultural heritage

and avoid:

- ▶ (4) Presenting a biased perspective of the Arab-Israeli conflict
- ▶ (5) Rejecting the rights of Jews and Israel's existence
- ▶ (6) Demonizing both Jews and Israel
- ▶ (7) Adhering to the guerrilla strategy of rendering Middle Eastern Jews a helpless minority through violence and international pressure

The Palestinian curriculum should eliminate its commitment to eternal war and the veneration of martyrdom. Schools have to stop teaching generation after generation of Palestinian youth that their homeland is comprised of the area that includes Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. "Resistance," translated into an eternal *jihad* war through *ribat* (frontier/guerrilla actions), should not be part of the curriculum.

Instead, Israel must be plainly described as a legitimate nation-state. Students are now left with a state of cognitive dissonance and confusion. The PA curriculum should cease describing Israel as the source of all evil. It should cease educating for a settlement policy of millions of Palestinians

in Israel and give up the concept of “resistance” (conquest of your neighbor by stages) and martyrdom (suicide killings) as recurring motifs.

Finally, the PA should stop endangering Palestinian children. They should not be used as cannon fodder for an old generation of guerrilla fighters and new generation of Islamists. The curriculum should give up the on the centrality of struggle, heroism, suicide and death. It should cease stereotyping Israelis as farcical villains and begin talking about them as neighbors and fellow humans who have a long history and cultural roots in the region.